

# FEMA Cautions Residents about the Dangers of Hurricane Sandy

WASHINGTON – At the direction of President Obama, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security's Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) continues to coordinate federal emergency response efforts and bring all available resources to bear to support state and local efforts. Today, officials are warning residents in states along the East Coast in hurricane-impacted areas about the deadly dangers that continue as Hurricane Sandy moves inland and will remain after the storm passes.

Last night, the President declared major disasters for New York and New Jersey, making disaster assistance available to those in the heaviest hit areas affected by the storm. Residents and business owners who sustained losses in the designated counties within New York and New Jersey can begin applying for assistance by registering online at <http://www.DisasterAssistance.gov> or by calling 1-800-621-FEMA(3362) or 1-800-462-7585 (TTY) for the hearing and speech impaired.

Federal, state, tribal and local partners continue to work around the clock, focusing on life saving activities such as rescue operations, assessing damage and restoring electric power. The U.S. Coast Guard and nine federal urban search and rescue task forces have been staged along the East Coast and are deploying into affected areas as needed, and requested by impacted states. An additional six federal urban search and rescue task forces have been placed on alert for potential activation if required. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services also has personnel deployed in support of state response efforts, including two 50-person Disaster Medical Assistance Teams providing triage and basic care in shelters in New Jersey. Additional medical teams are on alert. HHS also has personnel supporting 350 ambulances in New York. These medical providers will help ensure the shelter can meet the needs of residents seeking refuge there.

“Our thoughts and prayers are with those in the Mid-Atlantic states who've been affected by this storm. We strongly encourage all of those in affected areas to stay indoors, in a safe location and to continue to monitor conditions,” said FEMA Administrator Craig Fugate. “As the federal government continues to support the life-saving efforts of state, tribal and local officials, individuals need to do their part and remain out of harm’s way. Do not try to return home until local officials give the all clear.”

Evacuees who attempt to return home prematurely will be turned back as many roads are still impassable from storm surge, detoured roads, inland flooding, downed power lines and trees and other storm debris. Some neighborhoods are still flooded from high storm water and many areas have no water, sewage or other essential services. States, localities and the Red Cross continue to operate emergency shelters along the East Coast. To find a shelter, individuals can download the Red Cross Hurricane app, visit the Red Cross web site, call 1-800-RED CROSS (1-800-733-2767), or check local media outlets. They should also register on the Red Cross Safe and Well website, a secure and easy-to-use online tool that helps families connect during emergencies. To register, visit [www.redcross.org](http://www.redcross.org) or call 1-800-RED-CROSS (1-800-733-2767). This site also connects with the Twitter and Facebook accounts of users.

The Department of Energy continues to work with states and local partners as the electric industry begins the process of pre-mobilizing storm and field personnel to assist in power restoration efforts. For those without power, use caution when using portable generators to power lights, keep food cold. The Consumer Product Safety Commission and U.S. Fire Administration warn consumers never to use portable generators indoors on in garages, basements, or sheds. The exhaust from generators contain high levels of carbon monoxide.

For those who are clear to return home, drive only when necessary and avoid washed out roads and bridges. Be aware of falling objects such as branches and tree limbs, downed electrical wires and phone and cable

wires. Stay away from any buildings where you smell gas, where flood waters remain around the building or in your home, if your home was damaged by fire or if officials have not declared it safe.

In addition, last night, the President declared federal emergencies for Virginia and West Virginia, adding to the emergencies already declared, at the request of governors, in advance of the storm for Connecticut, Delaware, District of Columbia, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania and Rhode Island. These emergency declarations allow the federal government to provide direct support to state, tribal and local governments in activities intended to save lives and protect property.

As the storm continues to move inland, we encourage those who have not yet been affected by the storm to continue to monitor its progress. For those who have already begun experiencing the effects of the storm should continue to monitor NOAA Weather Radio and their local news for severe weather updates, warnings and watches and follow instructions of local officials. State and local officials make determinations and announcements about evacuations. We urge the public to listen to the instructions of officials, and if told to shelter in place, do so. If told to evacuate – evacuate.

Those in inland areas where the storm is producing snow or expected to produce snow should also have supplies in their emergency kits such as rock salt or environmentally safe products to melt ice on walkways, snow shovels, adequate clothing and blankets to keep warm and heating fuel like dry, seasoned wood for the fireplace or wood-burning stove. Both hurricanes and winter storms often cause power outages, take steps now to ensure you can sustain yourself for at least 72 hours if needed.

The FEMA smartphone app provides further safety tips and displays open shelter information at [www.fema.gov/smartphone-app](http://www.fema.gov/smartphone-app).

### ***Returning Home Safety Tips***

**Utility checks:** Check for downed or loose power lines and gas leaks. Gas leaks will smell like rotten eggs. Call the utility company immediately if you suspect you have a gas leak. If you see a downed power line, move away from the line and from anything touching it and contact your utility company. Do not try to move either the downed power line or anything in contact with it by using another object such as a branch, stick or broom. Do not drive over a downed line.

**Look for external damage:** Examine the foundation, roof and chimney for cracks or other damage. Inspect porch roofs and overhangs. If you find obvious damage or have serious doubts about safety, contact a building inspector before you go inside.

**Enter the building slowly and carefully:** If the door sticks at the top as it opens, it could mean the ceiling is ready to cave in. If you force the door open, stand outside to avoid being hit by falling debris. If in doubt about the safety of a building, do not enter. If the ceiling is sagging, or there are other signs the building is in a weakened condition or about to collapse, leave the building immediately.

**Protective clothing:** Wear protective clothing and make sure your hands, arms, feet and legs are covered. If you have cuts on your hands or other body parts, protect them from contact with water or debris. You will want to protect yourself from inhaling harmful odors or fumes while cleaning up. Even people with no known risk factors for mold should wear filtering face masks and gloves if they plan to do anything more than look around.

### **Safety Tips: After Entering a Building**

**Double check and re-check for gas leaks:** To be safe, assume there **COULD** be a gas leak in the house. Return to your home during daylight to avoid turning on lights. Do not light candles, cigarettes or operate electrical switches in the house until it has been inspected and is safe.

If you smell gas or hear a hissing or blowing sound, open a window and leave immediately. Turn off the main gas valve from the outside, if you can. Call the gas company from a neighbor's residence or from a cell phone away from the building.

**Be careful around electricity:** If possible, turn off the electricity at the main fuse box or circuit breaker. If the situation is unsafe, leave the building and call for help. If you are wet, standing in water, or are unsure of your safety, do not check the electrical system. You may want to have an electrician inspect your wiring. Do not turn on the lights until you are sure they're safe to use.

**Once the electrical power is turned off, unplug all appliances:** Clean them out and let them dry. Then have them checked by a professional before using them again.

**Check water and sewage systems:** If pipes are damaged, turn off the main water valve. Check with local authorities to make sure the water is not contaminated.

*FEMA coordinates the federal government's role in preparing for, preventing, mitigating the effects of, responding to, and recovering from all domestic disasters, whether natural or man-made, including acts of terror.*